



## *Opening Statement*

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### **Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas) Committee on Homeland Security**

#### **“Countering Violent Islamist Extremism: The Urgent Threat of Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Terror”**

#### **Remarks as Delivered**

Today, at the first hearing of the House Committee on Homeland Security in the 114th Congress, I’d like to take a moment of silence to remember all those who lost their lives at the hands of ISIS, especially Americans James Foley, Steven Sotloff and, most recently, Kayla Mueller.

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The victims are the reason why we are here today. We must keep those barbaric terrorists out of the homeland to protect the American people. This hearing will also assess the urgent and growing threat of terrorists recruiting and inspiring Americans.

We need to accurately define the threat – violent Islamist extremism – and recognize it is spreading like wildfire around the globe. These fanatics want nothing less than destruction of our way of life, and now their ability to match words with deeds is growing at an astonishing rate. In recent years, their safe havens have proliferated and their ranks have swelled.

In many ways, we are no longer talking about terrorist groups. We are talking about terrorist armies. ISIS now controls a territory the size of Belgium, governs millions of people, draws on billions of dollars in revenue, and commands tens of thousands of foot soldiers. And they are brutal – their latest act of barbarism was on full display with the horrific murder of the Jordanian pilot.

This evolving Islamist terror landscape has given rise to the “dual threats” of foreign fighter returnees and homegrown terrorism. The recent terror attack in Paris, and other attacks and plots in Belgium, Germany, the U.K., Australia, Canada, and here in the U.S. are proof that the threat has surged and that the enemy is dead set on attacking the West.

As Mr. Rasmussen notes in his testimony, more than 20,000 fighters from over 90 countries have made their way to the battlefield to join al Qaeda, ISIS, and other extremist groups – making this the largest convergence of Islamist terrorists in world history. That number continues to grow despite months of airstrikes. Up to 5,000 of these fighters are Westerners, many of whom are able to travel into the United States without obtaining a visa. More than 150 American citizens have attempted to or succeeded in getting to the battlefield—and we know some have already returned to our shores.

But extremists do not need to travel overseas in order to become a threat to our homeland. Through Hollywood-like propaganda videos and social media, Islamist terror groups are inciting their followers and potential recruits to wage war at home. Both ISIS and Yemen-based al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula have called for Westerners – including Americans – to “wage individual jihad” in their home countries – and it’s working. ISIS social media also gives step-by-step instructions on how to get to the fight and how to return.

Following the attacks in Paris last month, our European partners have been busy uncovering new terrorist cells and disrupting imminent plots. Also, just recently here at home, the FBI arrested an Ohio-based ISIS sympathizer who was intending to attack the U.S. Capitol with pipe bombs.

I am worried about our ability to combat this threat abroad, but also here at home. I wrote to the president recently and raised concerns that we still have no lead agency in charge of countering domestic radicalization and no line item for it in the budgets of key departments and agencies. I am also concerned that the few programs we do have in place are far too small to confront a threat that has grown so quickly.

Today, I hope to hear how the administration assesses the danger posed by foreign fighters, particularly Westerners, and the threat of homegrown terrorism here in the United States. More importantly, I hope we will hear about how the administration is responding—and plans to ramp up its response—to these challenges.

This morning I would like to welcome all of our witnesses but especially Mr. Rasmussen. It is his first appearance before Congress after being confirmed as the Director of the NCTC, and we look forward to his testimony.

As part of our Committee’s focus on this critical national security issue, the Ranking Member and myself are establishing a Task Force on Combatting Terrorist and Foreign Fighter Travel. The six-month task force will review U.S. government efforts – focusing on DHS – to disrupt terrorist travel into

our country and to combat the foreign fighter threat. It will ultimately provide recommendations to the Committee on how we can improve U.S. security against these dangers.

I am very disappointed that the State Department chose not to send a witness here today. The threats we are discussing are serious, and the State Department plays a key role in combating them. I recently sent a letter to the White House expressing my concerns over the Department's desire to resettle tens of thousands of Syrian refugees in the United States. I am worried ISIS could exploit this effort in order to deploy operatives to America via a federally funded jihadi pipeline.

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